

the glow of the cities below lead us back by fleurmatisse

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Summary:

When oddly familiar children show up to speak to the members of The Losers Club, they realize they must confront the memories of their childhood and, in the process, return to Derry, where the age old question guides their reunion: What does the Turtle want from them?

1. stanley's strange visitor

Author's Note:

this fic was inspired by two different og Twilight Zone episodes: Walking Distance (s1e5) and Nightmare as a Child (s1e29).

the title is from bishops knife trick by fall out boy and the summary is a paraphrased version of the description for nightmare as a child

this is also a mishmash of book and movie canon and i have probably gotten some lore wrong but such is the way when the source materials are 1200 pages and 5+ hours long

Tuesday, May 13, 2008

Atlanta, Georgia

Patty Uris gets home a little over an hour before her husband. She also leaves the house two hours before him every morning—school hours vs office hours—but he wakes up with her every day to give her a kiss goodbye. Because she gets home around four every afternoon and Stan isn't due back until just after five, she's by herself when the doorbell rings. She sets down the test she's grading and answers the door. A boy is standing on the small porch, looking at the birdhouses set just behind the front hedge.

"Hello," Patty says, genial. The boy turns to her. Something about him strikes her as familiar, though she can't place it. Maybe he lives in the neighborhood. He looks very serious. "Can I help you?"

"I'm looking for Stanley Uris," the boy says.

"I'm afraid he's not home yet," Patty replies. "I'm his wife, Patty. Maybe I could help?"

The boy studies her for a moment. He almost looks apologetic when he says, "I really need to talk to Stanley. It's important. If you don't mind, I'll just wait here until he gets home."

The boy turns back to the birdhouses. Patty suspects that he would go if she told him to.

“You can have a seat, if you’d like,” she says instead, and gestures to the chairs at the end of the porch when the boy looks back at her, surprised. He sits in the far chair. “Would you like anything to drink while you wait?”

“No, thank you,” the boy says.

“Would you mind if I wait with you?” Patty asks.

The boy looks surprised again, verging on alarmed. “I guess not.”

Patty steps out onto the porch and closes the door. She sits in the unoccupied chair, on the other side of the small table where Stan usually sets his binoculars when he’s watching the birds.

“Do you go to Traynor Middle School?” she asks the boy. He hadn’t quite stopped looking alarmed, but it comes back full force at her question. Patty gives him her calmest smile. “It’s just that you look very familiar. I’m an English teacher there.”

“Oh,” the boy says. He looks away. “No, I don’t go there. I’m—I’m just visiting.”

“And you came to see my husband,” Patty says.

“Yes,” the boy replies.

Patty watches the birds for a moment. She doesn’t find them as interesting as Stan does (she thinks only Stanley’s father matches his enthusiasm), but she likes the little chirping noises they make to each other as they pick at the sunflower seeds.

“Are you a family friend?” she asks the boy. “Or a relative? I haven’t met much of Stan’s family.”

The boy is quiet, and then he says, “We’re related.”

Stan’s car appears at the end of the driveway before Patty can ask how they’re related or even the boy’s name. She had suspected that

the boy might have leapt to his feet when Stanley got home, but he seems calmer, as if the purpose of his visit gave him fortitude.

“Hello, my dear!” Stan calls as he gets out of his car.

Patty smiles. “Hello, my dear,” she echoes as Stan comes up the walk. “You have a visitor. I’m afraid I haven’t gotten his name.”

She looks toward the boy, smile carrying over to him, but he’s watching Stan with a look of determination. She loses some of her smile and looks back at Stan, who’s stopped, staring at the boy, pale and visibly shaken.

“Stanley?” Patty says cautiously.

Stan doesn’t look away from the boy. “Could you give us a moment, my dear?”

She looks between them, and the sense of familiarity grows. The boy looks back at her and smiles, and she thinks, nonsensically blindsided, *That’s Stan’s smile*. But if they’re related...

“I’ll get everyone some lemonade,” she says, and looks at Stan with the hint of a frown. “I’ll be right back.”

She goes inside, leaving the door open as she goes, and rushes to grab the pitcher of lemonade from the fridge and three glasses from the cabinet. Then she stands out of sight of the doorway and listens. Normally she wouldn’t stoop to eavesdropping, but something about the look on Stan’s face has her lingering.

“You remember them,” the boy says. “For how long?”

“Bill has a book,” Stan says. Bill. Bill Denbrough, the horror novelist that Stan told her was one of his childhood friends. “And once I remembered him, I remembered all of it. But it can’t be real. *You* can’t be real.”

“You know the truth, Stanley,” the boy says. “Even if we don’t want to believe it.”

“No,” Stan says, fiercer than Patty is used to hearing him speak. “You

—” He stops. “Patty?”

Patty jumps, making the glasses clink together, and comes out from her hiding spot. She smiles like she hadn’t just been lurking, sets the glasses on the little table. “Here we are.”

She studies Stan’s tense face—he’s taken the seat she’d occupied earlier—and puts her hand on his shoulder. He holds it there, not looking at her or the boy but at the birds.

“Thank you, Mrs. Uris,” the boy says as he picks up his glass. Stan’s hand tightens over Patty’s.

“You’re very welcome,” Patty says with a smile.

“You should go,” Stan tells the boy.

“So should you,” the boy replies.

Stan gets out of the chair suddenly, making Patty startle again. He goes into the house without a word. The boy watches him go.

“Don’t let him take a bath this evening,” the boy says. Patty frowns—how does this boy know Stan takes baths to relax? When she doesn’t know him at all, and Stan seems not to like him very much. “He’s scared, but I think he’ll talk to you, if you ask him what happened in Derry. He thinks it’s like a bad dream.”

Patty stares at the boy, who gets out of the chair calmly.

“Remember: no bath,” he says. And then he walks down to the street and disappears behind the hedge. Patty doesn’t see him reappear at the neighbor’s property. She goes inside and stops Stan on his way to the bathroom.

“Stanley,” she says, feeling a dread she’d never be able to explain. “Don’t take a bath.”

He looks startled. She puts her hand around his wrist, a gentle grip but an insistent one.

“Tell me what happened in Derry.”

2. richie's rude guest

Chicago, Illinois

Richie gets home and there's a kid on the front steps. Now, "home" might not be the correct term to use, since technically this is his parents' house in Chicago, and Richie has long since moved to LA. And while the "home is where the heart is" argument *could* have been made—he does, in fact, love his parents—his parents are not currently home. Instead, they are on one of those norovirus cruises to Moldova or some shit, and Richie had oh-so-conveniently wanted a break from LA and his general life at about the same time as this vacation, so he's house sitting.

It's been two days since his parents embarked on their journey, Richie went out to get himself food he didn't have to cook himself (he wasn't risking burning his parents house down, okay?), and he came back to some dark haired kid lounging on the steps like he owned the place. Richie looks up and down the suburban street like one of the other residents—all around his parents' age—will come out of their house calling for their grandchild and thereby save Richie from this interaction.

No dice.

Richie opens the front gate and the kid watches his approach calmly.

"Uh, hey, kid, this is private property," Richie says.

"I know," the kid replies, unbothered.

Richie frowns at him. "Do your parents know where you are?"

"Yeah." The kid points to the takeout hanging from Richie's hand. "Can I have some of that? It's my favorite."

"No," Richie says, half-hiding the bag behind his legs, as if he expects the kid to jump up from his casual sprawl to try and take it from him. Richie doesn't know what he expects from this kid, really. "You can go home and have whatever your parents are having."

Seriously, if you stay out here, I'm gonna call the cops."

The kid grins. Doesn't make a move to get up. "Whatever you say, man."

Richie frowns again. There's plenty of room to go around the kid to get inside, and from there Richie can lock all the doors and, okay, maybe not call the cops, but his parents know everyone in the neighborhood, and Richie can call all of *them* and see if any of them have lost an unruly tweenager. The kid doesn't try anything when Richie edges past him, seeming content just to sit and look out at the neighborhood. Richie locks the door and takes his food to the kitchen and then thinks—the kid might be a lookout. A shitty lookout, but still.

So, armed with a poker from the fireplace, Richie checks every inch of his parents' house and comes to the uneasy conclusion that he is, in fact, alone. Before he starts eating, he looks out the front window and sees that the kid is gone. He breathes a sigh of relief and eats his dinner in peace.

The peace lasts until there's a knock at the door. Richie pauses the show he'd been half-watching, goes to the front of the house, and checks the window again. There's no one at the door. He presses his face to the glass, trying to see if there's something on the stoop, but there's no good angle. He starts to go back to the den, but there's another knock before he can get there. He sees nothing out the window again, braces himself to be blindsided by a group of tweens out for his dinner (sucks for them, he already ate all of it) and maybe his blood, and opens the front door.

Nothing.

He must be hearing things. He thinks if he made it to 32 without totally losing it, he's doing pretty well. He's earned the right to be hearing things. He shuts the door, turns around, and comes face to face with the kid from the stairs.

"Jesus Christ!"

"I'm flattered, but just Trashmouth is fine," the kid says. The name

makes all of Richie's threats of police and breaking and entering charges fly out of his mind.

"Trashmouth?" he says instead. "What the fuck kind of name is that?"

"It's a nickname," the kid says, like Richie is an idiot, and starts walking around the front of the house. "According to my friends, it's pretty accurate. Don't you have friends?"

Richie follows the kid, half feeling like he should pick up the fire poker again and half feeling like he's actually, genuinely losing his mind. "Of course I have friends," he says, even though, honestly, no names immediately come to mind. Not that he has to tell this delinquent kid that. His mind catches up with his mouth. "How the hell did you get in here? Actually, I don't care how you got in, just get out and maybe I won't call 911 when you're gone."

"You're not calling 911 whether I get out or not," *Trashmouth* — seriously, what the fuck—says, totally confident. He stops at the wall of pictures Richie's parents have had up since they moved in. He smiles and touches the frame of Went and Maggie's wedding photo. "That's a nice shot."

"Yeah, it's great," Richie says. "Are you after money or something? Is this some kind of weird hold up? Because I gotta tell you, I don't have anything for you."

Trashmouth looks away from the photo to make a face at him—again calling Richie an idiot. He's got glasses, and they're taped together at the temple. "No, idiot. I'm here for you."

Despite the fact that Richie is 32 and, if not necessarily strong in his own right, definitely bigger than this strange kid called Trashmouth, he feels a kick of fear at the back of his throat.

"What?" he manages to squeak ask.

Trashmouth laughs, hands clutching his stomach like this is the funniest thing he's seen in his life. "You should see your face right now! Oh, my God, dude, I'm not gonna kill you. Jesus, you're like a

foot taller than me, how do you think I'd manage that?"

"You could have a gun," Richie says, unhelpfully defensive. He gets the *you're an idiot* look again. "Okay, fine, you're not going to kill me, you don't want money, and you're not going to leave. What the fuck do you want?"

He can imagine the look of horror-slash-disappointment on his mother's face if she could hear him cursing at a twelve year old. He'd like to see how *she* would handle some kid just *appearing* in her house.

"I want you to think," the kid says simply. He doesn't even sound like he's making fun of Richie this time. He's got his hands in his pockets, looking at Richie expectantly.

"Think about what?" Richie asks.

"Your friends," Trashmouth says. "Tell me about them. When's the last time you saw them?"

Richie frowns. He thinks about the last person he saw before he left LA. He could call his agent his friend, right? "Three days ago, my friend Steve gave me a ride to the airport."

Trashmouth sucks his teeth. "I'm disappointed in you, Richie."

"What—" he starts, and then, "How—How did you know my name?"

"I know lots of things, Richie," Trashmouth says in a voice like how Richie imagines a wise man might sound. Trashmouth grins and steps closer. Richie takes a helpless step backwards. "I know Steve isn't really your friend. And I know you saw someone today that is."

"I didn't see anyone I know today," Richie says. Something about it makes him feel like he's lying.

"But you saw someone familiar, didn't you?" Trashmouth says, grin losing some of the edge that made Richie nervous just looking at it. "Someone you passed on the street, maybe, that made you stop and look back. Someone you thought you recognized. Someone you wanted to call out to?"

Richie frowns, ready to argue that no, he didn't, and what the hell would you know about it anyway, but then he thinks—wait a minute. There was someone, when he went to pick up his food. Coming down the sidewalk as he walked into the restaurant, he'd caught a glimpse of red and he'd stopped, turned to watch a woman with short, fiery hair and a long coat hustling away. He hadn't thought of it at the time, but before his brain can even catch up, his mouth is saying, "Beverly."

Trashmouth grins again, but it's more like he's proud of Richie. Richie, who's wondering who the fuck Beverly is when he feels something stab his left palm.

"Ow, fuck!" he says, and when he opens his hand to look at his palm, there's a scar running right through the middle of it. He stares. He looks up at Trashmouth, who's already got his left hand up. Matching scars. Richie blinks, and the scar on Trashmouth's hand is bleeding down his wrist. He blinks again and it's just a white line. "What the hell."

"Think about your friends," Trashmouth tells him again, hands returned to his pockets. He looks serious. "Think about Beverly. Come on, Richie, I know you can do it."

Richie thinks of the woman with the red hair. She was short, he knows, and she walked like she had somewhere important to be. She usually let Richie bum a cigarette if he asked. She—

Richie looks at Trashmouth. Trashmouth is looking at the pictures again. Beverly gave Richie cigarettes and laughed when he tried to impersonate the characters in the movies he saw with her and—and Ben. Ben Hanscom, who had the most obvious crush on her in the world and who was the mastermind of the underground clubhouse they built one summer. Richie, Ben, Bev, all the Losers. He'd taken a break one day while they were digging it out, and Mike (Mike!) had asked him why he wasn't helping and he'd said, "Got a bone in my leg."

And then Bill and Stan had come back from the dump and Eddie—

"What," Richie says, "the fuck."

Trashmouth looks at him almost sympathetically. He even says “Sorry” right before Richie gets hit with more images—awful images—a statue and a clown and bodies in a sewer. But worse than that, worse than *seeing*, he *feels* it. The fear. He barely makes it to the bathroom and ends up throwing up in the sink.

“What the fuck,” he says again, shaking as he grips the edge of the counter. Trashmouth is standing behind him when he looks in the mirror. He looks from his own reflection to the kid’s. It’s—him. Trashmouth Tozier, how could he have forgotten that? He throws up again.

“You’ll be okay, Richie,” younger him says over the sound of dry heaving. “As long as you have your friends, you’ll be okay.”

When Richie looks in the mirror again, he’s alone. He turns on the faucet and goes to look for the kid—the kid version of him what the fuck what the fuck what the *fuck*. But he’s alone again.

There’s a knock at the front door as he crosses back toward the bathroom. Richie whips it open without checking who it is first. He looks down at a woman with red hair and a long coat. She claps her hands over her mouth, eyes glittering, and Richie would be lying if he said he didn’t tear up too.

“Bev,” he says, and she reaches out and they’re hugging on the front stoop of his parents’ house like no time has passed, like they hadn’t all gotten split up to every part of the country.

“Oh, my God,” Bev says, laughing wetly against his shoulder. He laughs with her and holds on tight until she pushes him back to look at him. “Do you—the Losers—”

“I remember,” he says. “I remember all of it.”

“We have to find them,” Bev says, in a tone that leaves no room for argument. As if Richie would ever dream of saying no.

Bev’s kid self had been sitting out on her balcony, and she’d asked for a cigarette through the open window. Bev claims she nearly kicked

her off in shock, but Richie sees it as the exaggeration it is and laughs. From the sounds of it, young Beverly Marsh was much more polite than young Trashmouth Tozier about the whole *find Richie* thing. Richie is in no way surprised.

“What *were* they?” he asks, and Bev frowns, shakes her head.

“I don’t know,” she says. She squeezes his hand, which she’s been holding since Richie invited her to sit on the couch, as if letting go might mean losing each other all over again. Richie would sooner chop off his arm than sever the connection. “It didn’t...you don’t think it was It, do you? Like, *It* It?”

“I think if it was It, they would’ve tried to eat us, violently, and with way too many teeth” Richie says with a full-body shudder. Bev doesn’t laugh like he’d been hoping. She just looks thoughtful as she nods.

“There was something else that summer,” she says after a minute. She looks at him, and when he meets her eyes, they’re a little distant. As if she’s seeing him *and* the something else. “Didn’t—Didn’t Bill see something else?”

Richie looks away to think about it. It’s giving him a headache; he’d like to say he never thinks this much, but, of course, he does. “That sounds right, but I can’t think of what it was.”

“But it wasn’t like It,” Bev says, still thoughtful. “Whatever it was, it didn’t feel *evil* .”

“No,” Richie agrees. Trashmouth was mildly annoying and way too brazen, but that’s what Richie was like at the same age. The only part that didn’t seem quite right was the calm wait for Richie to understand. He’s sure if it had really been him, he would’ve smacked himself upside the head at least once. “So something else sent us our childhood selves so that we’d find each other. How did you find me, by the way?”

Bev’s distant look disappears, and she looks more like she might be making fun of him, eyes glittering when she says, “I looked you up in the Yellow Pages. How many Wentworth Toziers do you think live in

Chicago?”

Okay, fair to make fun of him, then. He laughs with her, and he thinks there's an edge to it. They found each other, and it was easy, but now they have to find everyone else.

“You think anybody else is conveniently in Chicago right now?” Richie says.

Bev sighs. “Probably not. I feel like they would've told us that instead of just reminding us of each other.”

Richie leans back on the couch, and Bev mirrors him so they're both looking up at the ceiling, hands clasped in the small expanse of cushion between them. “God I wish I still had a stash of weed here,” Richie says.

Bev laughs. “Yeah, I wish you did, too.”

She leans her head on his shoulder, and Richie presses his cheek to her hair. They used to sit like this on movie nights, Richie thinks, and once his parents had asked if they were a couple. Richie had laughed and laughed. He laughs now. Bev hums questioningly.

“Do you,” Richie starts, cut off by his own laughter. He forces it down so he can get out, “Do you remember when my mom thought we were dating?”

Bev is quiet for a second. She sounds like she's smiling when she says, “Didn't you tell her that if we were, you definitely didn't know about it?”

“And she told me to ask you, then!”

Bev starts giggling, and then she gets caught up in Richie's laughter until they're howling, tears running down their faces. Richie thinks it's probably not this funny, but the thrill of seeing Bev again makes him feel a little like he's high, a little like things are going to be okay. He thinks how part of the reason he'd laughed so hard was because while he and Bev would sit like this, Eddie would be squished into the couch, too, his legs across both their laps, and Richie had thought way more about what that meant than what he and Bev were doing.

His laughter slows down as he thinks of Eddie, and he wipes the tears off his cheeks before they can start coming for a different reason.

“How many people do you think have the last name Kaspbrak?” he asks, and ignores the way Bev looks at him like she’s not surprised.

“Probably not a ton,” she says, wiping her face with the collar of her shirt. “Do you remember where he moved to?”

Richie swallows hard. “No,” he says. “We left before him.”

Bev had left before both of them, so she wouldn’t know either. For all they knew, Eddie was still in Derry. The thought sits wrong with Richie. He doesn’t think any of them should be in Derry, but Eddie especially should be somewhere better.

3. eddie's walk down memory lane

Not New York City, New York

By the time Eddie stops his car, it's two p.m. and he's nearly run out of gas. Luckily for him, the place he's stopped is a gas station. Unluckily for him, the gas station appears to be closed. He gets out of the car anyway, stalks up to the building to look in the window for any employees, but it's dark and empty. It doesn't make sense for a gas station to be closed this early in the afternoon, he thinks, but it's well off the highway and he supposes it doesn't make sense for him to be here at all. Wherever *here* is anyway.

He should be at work, assessing various risks for various clients, and yet he had gotten as far as the street outside his office's parking structure and—instead of pulling in, parking his car, and going to his meeting—he'd driven away, and he didn't stop driving for nearly eight hours. Each time he'd thought about stopping, he'd thought about how that would mean he'd have to go back, to have dinner with Myra and feel the pressure of the ring he'd bought her, the one he was both certain he would give her and that he knew he shouldn't, and so he drove and drove until he got here, a gas station parking lot in the middle of nowhere.

He leans against the car, runs a hand tiredly over his face in the vain hope it will clear away his headache, and tries to see where, exactly, "here" is. Across the road, on a hand painted sign that has seen better days, white block letters declare DERRY 1.5 MILES.

Derry, Eddie thinks, and his hand freezes in the midst of rubbing his chin. Something in the back of his mind shifts. Derry, Maine. He grew up there, didn't? And how odd that he has to question it at all. He stares at the sign and feels a pull, like that's where he's supposed to be. Like his aimless driving wasn't so aimless after all.

He gets back in his car, intending to drive either toward or away from the town, but the engine refuses to turn over. Of course. A check under the hood reveals no mechanical issues, as if the car had decided it had simply had enough of Eddie's abuse. Didn't he know it was a city car? What was he thinking, bringing it all the way to

Maine?

Eddie doesn't know what he was thinking, and he still doesn't know when he abandons the car in the otherwise empty lot and starts walking his way into Derry. He almost turns around three separate times, a sense of foreboding overwhelming the initial pull (was it curiosity?) that had gotten him to cross the road and follow the sign's bold arrow. But he tells himself it's just a town, and he's only going so he can find a phone to tell Myra that he's going to miss dinner. (His cell phone had mysteriously found its way out of his car while he was going seventy down the interstate, and in the middle of it ringing with his office's number on the screen—crazy, really, if he thinks about it.)

As he crosses the town limits, he finds with a distant sort of surprise that it's familiar. He thought it must have changed in the last fifteen years, but the storefronts all seem to be the same ones he used to bike past. Even the decorations for the festival are the same: red, white, and blue balloons and banners, the inexplicable hay bales stacked around light posts. They look a little worse for wear, as if they've been hanging around for longer than a week, and—it's strange. Eddie is sure the festival was always in July. Would they have moved it up to when school is still in session?

He spots a pay phone a couple blocks down the street, and a drug store at the next corner. His headache has worsened as he's walked, certainly not helped by the mishmash of color assaulting his eyes, and he decides to make a pitstop. The door opens before he can grab the handle, and he has time to catalog a blur of red before he's being knocked into. He stumbles back, nearly winded by something hard hitting him in the stomach, but the person who had barreled into him falls back. Eddie looks down and finds a kid with an arm in a cast looking similarly stunned.

"Are you okay?" he asks, offering a hand. The kid looks at his hand and then up at him and then scrambles to his feet, injured arm holding a paper bag to his chest.

"Sorry, I'm fine, sorry," the kid says, lightning quick, and darts around Eddie and down the sidewalk before Eddie can do more than blink.

Strange, Eddie thinks again, frowning after the kid. Then he brushes it off like any good New Yorker and heads inside the drug store. The thought occurs to him again in the aisle filled with pain relievers. Strange how all the logos look dated. Strange how when he picks up one of the boxes the expiration date ends with 91, and that the next three boxes say the same. He takes one of them to the counter, where a teenage girl is reading a magazine behind the register. She looks familiar. Her nametag says Ruby. Eddie drops the box. It lands on the floor with a clatter.

Ruby jumps and looks up, a moment of surprise before she's smiling at him in a distant sort of way—not like she did when he was a kid coming in nearly every week. "Can I help you, sir?"

Eddie scrambles to pick up the box and sets it on the counter. "Sorry," he says, and then, "I don't want this anymore," before he's rushing out of the store. This is crazy. He's going crazy. Or he crashed his car and this is some strange vision before he dies, reliving one of the worst days of his life, and to what end? To resign him to misery before he's sent to Hell?

He forces his feet to stop. He's been walking as he's panicked, and he's startled to recognize the street he grew up on, the house he grew up in, with his mother's car parked in front of it and the front door bursting open. The kid from the pharmacy is running out, and—Eddie's mother is yelling after him. Eddie watches from the corner as the kid bikes in the opposite direction, until his mother stops yelling and crying and slams the door again. He couldn't believe it as a kid and he can't believe it now that she didn't just drive after him, force him into the car and bring him back to the house to lock him in with her forever.

Neibolt. The house forces its way into his mind like a rat through a crack under a door. He's heading to Neibolt, he's heading *under* Neibolt, and Eddie wants nothing more than to stop himself, to stop all of them, God, they're just kids, but...what would happen then?

He's seen Back to the Future (all three of them, actually, with Richie and Bill and the rest of the Losers), and if he really is in the past, if he really is in 1989, is he supposed to stop them? Then again, why else would he be back here? The idea that he's really just dying

comes to him again, and he wishes that, if that is the case, Death would just get it over with before he has to make a decision.

He heads toward Neibolt, in case that is what he's supposed to be doing, and even though he's practically running, it doesn't feel like he's going fast enough. By the time he reaches the street, the Losers are filing out of the house, soaked and dirty and silent. It couldn't have happened that fast. They should still be running after Bill, not even coming face to face with Pennywise yet.

Eddie watches helplessly as they all get on their bikes, pedaling past him without even taking notice of the stranger at the end of the street. He remembers that ride, how they'd all gone into town and Richie had cracked a joke and Eddie couldn't believe it. That they had made it out. That it was going to be okay. (Was it going to be okay?)

He looks at the house. He almost expects it to sprout legs and start running toward him, or for the leper—he recoils as the memory hits him—to crawl out from under the porch and yell at him. He shouldn't be testing fate like this. Sure, they'd just beat It, but did that count when Eddie wasn't from this time? Is him being here just one of Its tricks? His breath catches at the thought, his throat squeezing desperately at the air and only succeeding in choking him.

He reaches for his inhaler, but it isn't in his pocket. It's back in the real world, sitting in his car, and besides, he thinks scathingly at himself, he doesn't need it anyway. Isn't that what he'd learned, what had sent him running out of the pharmacy? He never had asthma, and if he managed to help kill a shapeshifting clown without keeling over, he can handle looking at this trashy old house, can handle walking toward it with the morbid need to *know* .

They did kill It, didn't they?

He gets as far as the yard before something in the grass catches his eye and he diverts from his path to the door. It's his fanny pack, his inhaler and pillbox spilling out into the dirt. Later, he would be coming back for it. Now, he picks it up again, opening one of the box's little compartments. He never found out what it was his mother was giving him. Sugar pills? Something worse?

He snaps the compartment shut and shoves the container in the fanny pack. He's already thrown it once, but he throws it again, harder and farther, into the shadows along the fence where it blends in with trash and debris. It will make his younger self panic, not being able to find it. He feels bad for a second before he turns back to the house. He has to know, and to know, he has to go in.

"Not yet," a voice that sounds a lot like his own says, and then he's blinking up at the gas station, leaning against his car, his hand poised to try and rub away his headache.

He looks at his hand and drops it to his side and then drops the rest of himself to the ground, where he stares at the gas station like it's a mirage in the desert and he's just waiting for it to show itself to be nothing but heat lines and his own imagination. As his vision blurs and shakes, he realizes he's crying, big wracking sobs that, once they're acknowledged, have him curling around his knees and burying his head under his arms. He's never been sick. He hasn't always been alone.

A noise makes him jump, and he looks up. A very uncomfortable-looking gas station employee is standing a few feet away.

"Are you okay, sir?" they ask. Eddie stares at them for a drawn out moment, thinking how he'd asked himself that not even an hour ago. His younger self. Because he went back to 1989 Derry. And then he laughs, and the poor gas station employee, who probably makes minimum wage—which is not enough to have to deal with this situation—only looks more nervous.

"I'm sorry," he says, struggling to his feet. By some instinct, he knows his car will start if he gets in. "I just remembered something I hadn't thought about in years."

Something and a number of someones.

The gas station employee does not look in any way comforted by this information. Eddie barely keeps himself from laughing again.

"Sorry," he repeats and pulls out his wallet. He holds out a couple bills. "Can I get twenty on whatever pump you recommend?"

“Um,” the employee says, taking the bills as if they’ll explode in their hand. “I’ll ring you up on four.”

They go back into the building, glancing back a few times as Eddie gets in his car and takes it to the pump. It’s the one farthest from the door. At least now when Eddie laughs he doesn’t have to feel bad for scaring anyone but himself. He looks to the sign that tells him Derry is just a mile and a half away. He wonders if any of the Losers still live there. If any of them remember like he does.

He refills his car’s gas tank and resolves to find out.

Notes for the Chapter:

it's eddie! this was inspired by walking distance rather than nightmare as a child, although i didn't go full blown "chasing a child through a carnival" like the twilight zone episode (that's more of a bill thing). thank u for reading/kudosing/commenting. if u noticed any errors feel free to point them out as i edited this chapter myself and my brain just autocorrects to what it knows i meant as i read. future updates will also be on tuesdays, although if i finish the last few chapters sooner than anticipated i will probably start updating more frequently. (i sometimes post about my progress on tumblr @ fleurmatisse) and that's it. see you next week :)